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CONTINUOUS FACTORY INSPECTION
and
LABELING OF CANNED FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN TERMS OF U. S. GRADES

Many questions are asked by individuals interested in the continuous factory inspection program of the United States Department of Agriculture and in U. S. grade labeled canned fruits and vegetables. An attempt has been made to answer briefly the more important of these questions.

1. What is meant by "continuous factory inspection" by the Production and Marketing Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture?

"Continuous factory inspection" signifies that qualified Federal inspectors of the United States Department of Agriculture are present in the canning plant at all times it is in operation, observing the preparation and packing of the canned food products.

2. How did the continuous factory inspection plan start?

It was suggested by canners and consumers.

3. How may consumers identify the foods packed in plants under continuous inspection?

These foods may be labeled in terms of U. S. grades, such as "U. S. Grade A," "U. S. Grade B," and "U. S. Grade C," and may bear on the labels the legend "Packed under the Continuous Inspection of the U. S. Department of Agriculture." Even though the U. S. grade and the inspection statement may be omitted, these foods can usually be identified by a shield embossed in the cover of tin and in the bottom of glass containers; this shield, however, does not indicate whether the product is Grade A, B, C, or off-grade.

4. When was the present continuous factory inspection service begun in plants canning fruits and vegetables?

Continuous factory inspection was conducted in one plant as an experiment during the canning season of 1939. In 1940, continuous inspection was introduced in five other plants. Many additional plants requested the service for the 1941, 1942, and 1943 canning season. It has been granted to all those plants in the appended list. This list also indicates the different commodities packed in each of the plants named.

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5. Why was the continuous factory inspection service spoken of as an "experiment" when it first began?

The United States Department of Agriculture wished to ascertain consumer and industry reaction to products packed under the continuous inspection program. For the benefit of consumers and producers, the Department is constantly seeking ways to assist in marketing agricultural products more satisfactorily. If consumers develop a more wholesale regard for canned products as the result of such inspection, it is hoped a wider market will develop for canning crops. Hence, the service was merely experimenting in a new field.

6. Why was the service being rendered only in a few plants at its inception?

Because of its experimental nature. Plants thus operating were carefully selected, due consideration being given to the physical plant properties, excellence of plant equipment, the plant's location with reference to proximity to canning crops, and the willingness of the personnel to cooperate with the Department in improving their products. The Department feels it can ascertain the value of such service by operating in but a few plants carefully chosen in various parts of the United States and packing a varied line of products.

7. Will continuous factory inspection be established on a permanent basis?

It may be if it is found to be of demonstrated value to the industry and to the consumer.

8. What requirements have been met by participating plants?

The plants have been thoroughly inspected to make sure that the sanitary conditions meet the rigid requirements of the Service. These requirements have to do with sanitation in the plant, adequate provisions for personal cleanliness of employees handling food, and proper observance of superior housekeeping standards.

9. Are inspectors on duty at all times in plants operating under continuous inspection?

Inspectors must be in the plant whenever the plant is in operation.

10. Are these Government inspectors employed under Civil Service regulations?

Yes.

11. Who pays the expenses of continuous factory inspection?

Each cooperating canner pays a fee sufficient to cover the salaries of the inspectors plus 15 per cent for the overhead expenses of the service. Fees are paid into the United States Treasury.

12. Will the price of foods canned in factories under continuous inspection be increased as a result of this service?

Prices currently quoted on these canned foods are in line with prices quoted on canned foods of corresponding quality packed in plants without this service. Conclusive data are not yet available, but there are indications that continuous factory inspection may result in reducing other expenses sufficiently to cover the cost of the service. In any event, it is believed that the cost to the canner will not be more than from two to four ten thousandths of a cent per can of the size sold to consumers.

13. Who develops the standards for the different Government grades for canned fruits and vegetables?

Standards for permissive use are developed by the Department after a careful study of the product, investigation of the problems of the canner, consideration of marketing practices, and checking on the needs of consumers. Preliminary standards are drafted and approved only after they have been submitted for consideration and suggestion to the producer, canner, distributor, retailer, and consumer and have been revised in the light of written suggestions from these interested groups. Approved U. S. standards for grades are revised from time to time as experiences in the use of the grades, advances in processing foods, and improvements in methods of inspection and grading may demonstrate revision to be desirable.

14. What are the general requirements of U. S. Grade A canned fruits or vegetables?

U. S. Grade A are fine quality canned fruits and vegetables, carefully selected as to size, color, degree of maturity, and freedom from blemishes. The fruits are fleshy, highly colored, and ripe. They are almost always packed in sirup, which may be extra-heavy (very sweet), heavy (sweet), light (somewhat sweet), or water slightly sweetened. For certain purposes the fruit may be packed in water without sweetening. U. S. Grade A canned vegetables are very tender, immature, and succulent.

15. What are the general requirements of U. S. Grade B canned fruits or vegetables?

The products in U. S. Grade B are of very good quality, though not quite so well selected as to color, size, and maturity as U. S. Grade A products. Grade B canned fruits are well-developed and well-colored, and are packed in sirup or water. U. S. Grade B canned vegetables are not quite so succulent and tender as those used for U. S. Grade A.

16. What are the general requirements of U. S. Grade C canned fruits or vegetables?

Products in U. S. Grade C are of good quality but are not so uniform in color, size, and maturity as U. S. Grade B products. U. S. Grade C canned fruit may not be so highly colored, or so carefully selected as to size and symmetry, and though mature may vary somewhat in ripeness. The fruit may be packed in sirup or water. U. S. Grade C vegetables in some cases may have more food value than either U. S. Grade A or B as they usually are more mature than the products in the higher grades.

17. Are any canned foods which are below U. S. Grade C in quality found in retail stores?

Yes. Some canned foods fail to meet the requirements of U. S. Grade C but are wholesome, nutritious, and acceptable in flavor. If a canned food, for which a minimum standard of quality has been promulgated under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, falls below this standard, the label on the container must indicate in what way this food fails to meet the minimum standard of quality.

18. Are all canned fruits and vegetables, which meet the requirements of U. S. Grade A, B, or C, as established by the United States Department of Agriculture, good foods?

Yes, they are all wholesome, nutritious foods.

19. What part may consumers contribute to the continuous factory inspection program and to the labeling of canned fruits and vegetables in terms of "U. S." grades?

Consumers may contribute to this program in inspection and U. S. grade labeling by conducting studies:

To ascertain consumers' reactions to the canned fruits and vegetables packed in plants under the continuous inspection of the Department.

To ascertain whether consumers prefer canned products conventionally labeled with brand names and information necessarily carried on labels as required by law or if, in addition, they desire more specific information as to the grade of the product in terms of Grade A, Grade B, Grade C, U. S. Grade A, U. S. Grade B, and U. S. Grade C.

To ascertain consumer reaction to continuous inspection by the Department in canning plants.

20. Where are inspectors of processed products (canned, dried, dehydrated, and frozen) fruits and vegetables of the Department located aside from in the canning plants under the continuous inspection of the Service?

Inspectors of processed foods are stationed at the Inspection Offices and Laboratories of the Production and Marketing Administration where processed foods are inspected and graded.